

# Module- Know Your Body Know Your Rights Workshop

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## Background

How much do you know about your body? Women and girls are not encouraged to talk about their bodies and the changes that come about within them as they grow up. There is stigma attached to certain natural processes that occur in women's bodies that prevent them from being able to be open about it. The curiosity about the body is frequently curbed by the society because it is considered shameful, inappropriate and impure. This lack of knowledge results in feelings of anxiety, fear and shame about one's body along with low self image. It can also hinder women and girls from accessing healthcare, impinging upon their overall well being. Hence, it is essential that we challenge the taboo surrounding these issues and create safe spaces to dialogue about them. Sexuality is another area that is never talked about, especially by women. This culture of silence which pervades sexuality discourages women and girls from accessing critical information related to sexual preferences and activities, including using contraception. Lack of information makes them vulnerable to sexual violence and abuse, as well as unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. This module is aimed at providing information and building awareness about sexual and reproductive health to students. It focuses particularly on issues related to menstruation, body image, sexuality, consent and relationships.

## Objectives

By the end of this module, the participants will be able to:

1. Achieve a deeper understanding of changes that take place within their bodies
2. Break the myths surrounding menstruation and menstrual taboos
3. Be more comfortable in their own bodies
4. Comprehend romantic attraction and the concept of beauty
5. Build clarity on the concept of sexuality
6. Become aware of various types of contraption and its side effects
7. Understand the importance of consent in relationships
8. Develop an understanding of patriarchy as the systemic root of gender inequality and its impact on all our lives

## Day 1

### Activity 1 – Ice Breaker and Welcome

Time	Methodology	Materials Required
30 minutes	Discussion	Whiteboard Markers

After welcoming the participants to the workshop and playing a game which will make them comfortable around each other and acclimatized to the space, the facilitator gives a brief orientation about the workshop and its purpose, which is to understand our bodies and our selves better. Participants can also be encouraged to share their expectations from the workshop. The facilitator compiles all the expectations on the board and sees if the objectives set out earlier match them.

Those that are beyond the scope of the workshop are set aside and a clarification given by the facilitator that it will not be possible to fulfil those expectations in the present workshop. If there are any additional concerns, the facilitator tries to accommodate them in the schedule or explains how they can be solved. Participants are then introduced to the schedule of the workshop.

After the orientation and goal setting, the facilitator invites the participants to discuss and establish some rules for the workshop space. Some rules can be suggested by the facilitator, which include:

1. Punctuality
2. Respect for other people's voices – no talking/whispering when someone else is speaking
3. Respect for people's privacy – whatever is shared remains within the space. No talking/teasing later
4. Non-judgemental attitude

### Activity 2 – Thoda Sa Revision

Time	Methodology	Materials Required
30 minutes	Discussion	Board with chart papers Markers Question list

This session involves recollecting the previous year's workshops and reflecting over their learnings. Some questions to lead the discussion are:

1. What is the difference between sex and gender?
2. Impact of gender roles
3. What is the definition of violence?
4. What are the types of violence?
5. What are the possible redressal mechanisms?
6. Any action/change done in their personal life towards gender equality/ against VAW

### Activity 3 – Understanding Our Bodies

Time	Methodology	Materials Required
1 hour 30 minutes	Body mapping	Menstruation flipchart

Interactive discussion Flipchart on menstruation	Chalk
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In this session, the participants are acquainted with different parts of their bodies, especially their reproductive systems and organs, and learn their functioning.

To start the exercise, the facilitator asks for two volunteers from the group. The volunteers have to lie supine on the floor while other participants draw the outline of their bodies. After they have finished drawing the outline, the volunteers have to get up and the facilitator emphasizes that these two outlines are now two abstract bodies (not belonging to the people whose outlines were traced) which could be anyone's bodies. One body is ascribed male status and while the other becomes female. The participants are then asked to draw the various parts of the body and depict and label different organs, both visible and inside the body.

After both the groups have filled in details into the body, they are asked to present them to the larger group. The participants have to show where a particular organ is located and what its function is. The facilitator can then discuss how our bodies are so special, so perfectly designed. But many times we don't know what goes on inside our bodies, which makes us anxious and ashamed. The facilitator then proceeds to talk about the reproductive system, and briefly explains how the process of reproduction works in males and in females, and the organs involved in that. Care has to be taken to talk about these sensitively, but at the same time emphasizing that our bodies have been designed very thoughtfully, each bodily process has an important function to play and hence nothing is shame-inducing.

Following this, the facilitator uses the flip chart/apron to talk about the menstrual cycle in detail. Here again, it is important to talk about how there is nothing dirty or shameful about the process of menstruation since it is a natural and beautiful way our bodies prepare for a new life. Further, the facilitator can discuss various myths and taboos surrounding menstruation and ask the participants to think if the myths hold up if thought about rationally. Women are debarred from visiting temples or even participating in any so-called auspicious or holy ceremony like weddings, *poojas* etc. or are forced to take pills to delay the menstrual periods in the event of such ceremonies which have terrible side effects. In traditional households women are not allowed to touch anything especially in the kitchen and *pooja* room. Many families ask the woman to sit aside in a separate room, sleep on the floor and eat simple food. In actual fact she requires better nutrition during this time to overcome the weakness caused by loss of blood. She also needs a comfortable bed to sleep on as she is already suffering from lower backache and pain in the abdomen. In the discussion, it is important to connect the fear and shame surrounding menstruation to patriarchy and how it uses women's bodies and bodily processes to construe them as weak and inferior.

Hygiene is another concern and should be discussed. In remote areas and rural parts women cannot afford sanitary napkins which are also not easily available to them. So they end up using just layers of old cloth which they wash and use again or cloth with a layer of ash in between. Due to inability to maintain hygiene and cleanliness women often contract infections of the reproductive or urinary tract.

Along with this, the facilitator should clear other myths and misconceptions regarding reproduction. These include the onus of creating a male baby – women cannot be blamed as our genes (particularly the X and Y chromosomes) determine whether we will be males or females. Rather, it is the male egg or the sperm that determines the sex of the baby as sperms can carry either an X or a Y chromosome

## Lunch: 45 minutes

### Activity 4 – What is Beauty?

Time	Methodology	Materials Required
2 hours	Film screening Group discussion	Projector and sound system Chart papers Markers

This purpose of this session is to enable the participants to build a deeper understanding of the concepts of beauty and desire, and to promote a healthy body image in all the participants.

In the beginning, the facilitator asks the participants to write their responses to the following three questions on piece of paper:

1. What do I look like at present?
2. What do people tell me I should look like?
3. What do I want to look like?

After writing their answers, the participants are asked to share their responses to each questions and the facilitator notes their responses on a board. If someone says, ‘I want to look beautiful’, the facilitator starts a discussion on the question, what is beauty? Do we think only certain people are beautiful? Then, the facilitator shows pictures of acid attack survivors and asks the participants, do you think these women are beautiful? Is it their fault that they look this way? Do we get to choose how we look like? So then why do we judge others – and ourselves – on the way we look? The facilitator can also talk to the participants about acid attacks as a form of violence against women, and despite the brutality that has happened to them, the survivors have the courage and confidence to face the camera, the world. So why don’t we? Why do we hide behind makeup, etc?

The facilitator can use other tools such as films (example – Evolution, made by Dove) that depict how much of a role makeup, lighting, and Photoshop have in making someone look ‘beautiful’. This can give a message to the participants that the kind of beauty that is promoted by popular media and culture today is unreal, and hence unattainable. And yet we all measure ourselves up against that standard.

#### Some more questions to prompt discussion:

- Who decides how we should look/dress, how are bodies should be formed/ our figure?
- Should we feel depressed sometimes due to our bodies as they are?
- Should beauty contests and film heroes/ heroines decide the way we look?
- Is it alright to let our health suffer to fit into the ideal shape or figure?

The facilitator explains that we need to be comfortable with our own bodies and not be influenced or develop a complex due to what is being propagated by the media or dictated by society.

## Tea: 15 minutes

### Activity 4 – Relationships and Romantic Attraction

Time	Methodology	Materials Required
1 hour 30 minutes	Writing exercise Group discussion	Chart papers Markers

The facilitator initiates a discussion on different types of relationships and what is expected of us in maintaining them. A diagram is drawn on the board showing the individual and her/ his different levels of closeness or proximity with people in these different relationships. This can be represented by a diagram of concentric circles with the central point indicating the individual.

After this, the facilitator moves the discussion forward by posing the following questions and eliciting responses from the participants:

1. What attracts us in an individual? *Ask for everyone's response*
2. What happens when we feel attracted to someone?

The participants will be asked to write their experience in one page on the topic of “My first attraction”. They will be encouraged to express themselves in any creative form such as poem, story, etc. They can also share the experience of their first crush, first relationship, and so on.

The facilitator discusses above issues and invites questions which are then answered.

#### Some common questions:

**Attraction to the opposite sex** – This is something quite normal and should not be frowned upon as something wrong or sinful. Girls and boys should intermingle and get to know each other so that they understand each other's point of view. This can lead to a better understanding and be the basis for a healthy friendship or relationship.

**Taboo relationships: Incest** – There are certain relationships which are not accepted by any civilized human society e.g. those between father and daughter, mother and son, sister and brother (born from the same parents). There are more cases of a father forcing himself on his daughter and sometimes even if the mother knows about it she looks the other way because they are all dependent on the man of the house and do not have any resources to break away and sustain themselves. In such cases a girl must find somebody whom she can trust and tell them about this exploitation. She must seek help from the special cell closest to her home or an NGO which can help her to lodge a complaint against her father for sexual abuse and get him arrested or at least stop the sexual abuse. Keeping quiet is not the solution.

**Feeling of being spoilt/ used after a break-up leading to depression** – Though it is natural to feel sad or depressed when any relationship breaks girls face more problems because of the norms laid down by society. Boys can have as many relationships as they want and this doesn't affect their future but girls feel that they will get a bad name in society if people come to know about their relationship and this will prevent them from finding a good match and leading a happy married life. They also feel they have been used. However, if two people enter into a relationship by mutual consent, both have to be ready for the consequences if the relationship breaks. Girls should not think that this will spoil their entire life. They should take the responsibility of the risk that they have taken by trusting their partner. They should not think that now that they are not a virgin nobody will marry them. They should learn from the experience not to trust anybody so easily and move on. They should carry on with their education, work and life just as boys do and not let it spoil their entire life. They must understand that relationships are a part of life and not their entire life.

**Negotiations with boyfriends: consent and coercion** – Girls have the right to say no if they do not want to enter into a relationship. They should not let themselves be pressurised by the boy. Mutual consent is necessary. Even while in a relationship girls should not let boys control their lives under the pretext of being caring and protective. Girls must maintain their right to decide what they want to study, where they want to go, when they want to meet their other friends, what time they want to return home from anywhere. They must continue to take their own decisions because control is also a sort of violence. Nobody should tolerate violence in a relationship. If any action by one's partner is causing emotional, psychological or physical hurt or disturbance one should seek help immediately instead of suffering in silence.

The facilitator can elucidate the Four Relationship Pillars, upon which a healthy relationship is based. These are:

1. **Mutual Communication** – Expressing one's feelings to one's partner is the very basis of forming a good understanding. Without this it is very difficult for two people to understand each other.
2. **Mutual Understanding** – Only if two people understand each other can they be supportive of each other and help each other to overcome their weaknesses. This is crucial for a relationship.
3. **Mutual Respect** – Unless one respects somebody they cannot love that person. Feelings of sympathy or pity should not be mistaken for love.
4. **Mutual Consent** – Both partners in a relationship have the right to say no. If one person does not want something, the other person should respect his/her wishes.

## Day 2

### Recap of previous day: 30 minutes

#### Activity 5 – Sexuality

Time	Methodology	Materials Required
1 hour	Group discussion	Chart papers

In this session, the participants will be introduced to the topic of sexuality. The focus would be to break myths and taboos around sexuality and sexual practices. Taking forward from the earlier day's session on attraction, the facilitator invites the participants to explore the different kinds of attraction we feel. After eliciting some responses from the participants, the facilitator explains the concept of sexual attraction.

Usually, after puberty sets in, sexual desire in both sexes manifests itself as an attraction for the opposite or sometimes same sex. Sexual urges are a natural phenomenon and there is nothing wrong or sinful about them. Animals as well as human beings experience this urge. However, it is important that as human beings we learn to deal with this urge and not force ourselves on anybody and do not allow anybody to force themselves upon us. That is what differentiates human beings from animals.

#### **Some more topics to discuss/break myths:**

**Masturbation:** Discussion on satisfying one's own sexual needs if one feels the need and not feeling guilty about it. As long as it is done in one's own private space and is not used to intimidate or harass someone there is nothing wrong about it.

**Pre-Marital Sex:** In Indian society it is not considered right to have sex before marriage; it is considered a sin to have sexual relationships except in marriage. These values need to be carefully examined in today's context and in a situation where girls and boys are not equal. Girls are expected to be virgins till they get married while boys are free to explore their sexuality. This is another way to control women in a patriarchal society.

It is perfectly normal for two people to feel attracted mentally and physically to each other and wanting to get close to each other. This may even lead to a physical relationship which is perfectly alright. There is no reason to feel guilty about such a relationship. However, in a male dominated society like ours what usually happens is that though the attraction is mutual and the relationship also may be by mutual consent, if this does not end in marriage the girl has to face the consequences. She is labelled as loose or fast and if she gets pregnant she has to go through the trauma of abortion.

**Sexual Drive:** It is a general belief that girls do not have a sex drive while boys cannot control their sex drive both of which are not absolutely true. Girls also have sexual needs and boys can control their sexual urge if they understand that a relationship is a mutual process and it is not their right to have sex with whoever they choose. They should respect girls and accept that they have a right to say no. They should stop looking at women as mute objects of their lust.

**Different Genders:** Besides male and female genders there are people whose sexuality is a mixture of both characteristics. Their physical appearance, voice etc. maybe a mixture of both. These individuals have a different genetic make-up from males and females. They are therefore called transgenders (eunuchs/ 'hijras'). They do not have the capacity to produce children. However, some people may have normal, functional reproductive organs but do not feel comfortable in the sexuality bestowed on them by birth. e.g. They may be male by virtue of their bodies but may feel more comfortable behaving/ dressing like a woman. Similarly there are women who feel more comfortable

behaving like men. These individuals feel trapped in their bodies and sometimes even undergo surgery for sex – change.

### Activity 6 – Contraception

Time	Methodology	Materials Required
1 hour	Group discussion	Chart papers Markers

The facilitator explains the different types of contraceptives using the contraception chart. This shows the different kinds of contraceptives used by men and women, along with their usage and side-effects. The focus must be to show how most contraceptives, especially the one with the most side effects, affect women’s bodies and well-being. Emphasise that it is okay, and even necessary, to insist on using contraceptives, especially if one has multiple partners.

The facilitator also address how different contraceptive methods protect, and to what extent, us from sexually transmitted diseases.

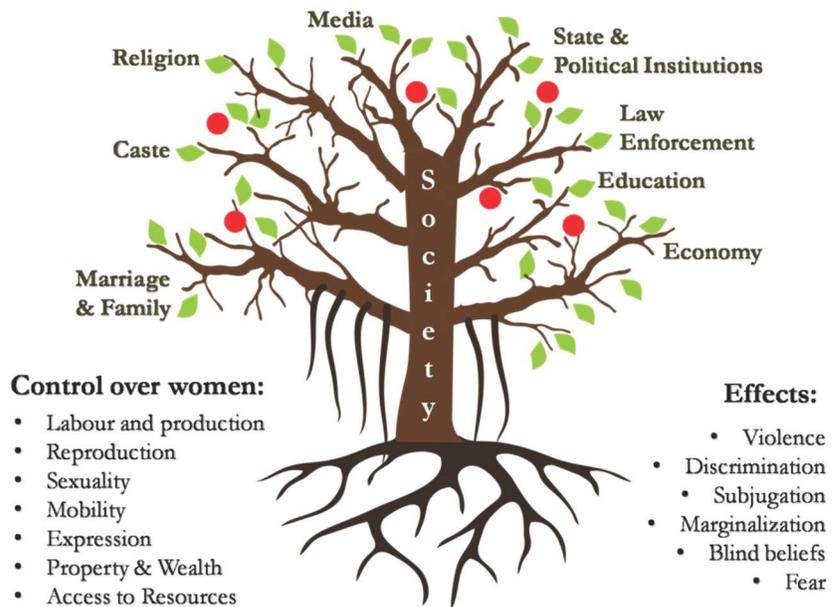
### Lunch – 1 hour

### Activity 8 – Patriarchy Tree

Time	Methodology	Materials Required
1 hour	Group discussion	Chart papers Markers

Begin a PowerPoint presentation called the ‘Patriarchy Tree’. Here, the society is imagined as a tree whose root is the ideology of patriarchy. This creates a society which is hierarchical, which gives preference to those who are (or behave like) men and oppresses those who don’t.

The branches of the tree are the various social institutions through which patriarchy operates to exert control over and oppress women. This control is further strengthened by the ‘aerial roots’ of the tree, which signify the various forms of control over women’s bodies,



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mobility, sexuality, etc. Finally, the 'fruits' of the tree are the effects seen in society, which are violence, discrimination, and fear.

### **Summary and Conclusion – 30 mins**

The facilitator asks the participants to do a 'harvesting' of their collective learning from the workshop. Each participant has to name one new piece of information that they learned in the past two days.

In conclusion, the facilitator emphasises that our body is our private premise and nobody has the right to violate it in any way. Only with our consent and approval can a physical relationship be established and enjoyed.

Participants may be asked for their reactions and asked what they have gained from the workshop. They may be asked to write their comments in 2 lines and give it to the facilitator.